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Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines
Articles will typically range in length from 750–4,500 words, but longer pieces will be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to: *review_editor@platypus1917.org.* All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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The future of socialism

What kind of illness is capitalism?

Chris Cutrone

An abridged version of this article was presented at the 4th Platypus European Conference closing plenary panel discussion, "What is the Future of Socialism?," with Boris Kagarlitsky (Institute of Globalization and Social Movements), Alex Demirovic (Rosa Luxemburg Foundation), Mark Osborne (Alliance for Workers' Liberty; Momentum) and Hillel Ticktin (Critique journal), at Goldsmiths University in London on February 17, 2018.

> The liquidation of [Marxist] theory by dogmatization and thought taboos contributed to the bad practice. . . . The interpretation of both moments [of theory and practice] is not settled once and for all but fluctuates historically. . . . Those who chide theory and practice] is not settled once and for all but fluctuates historically. . . . Those who chide theory [for being] anachronistic obey the *topos* of dismissing, as obsolete, what remains painful [because it was] thwarted. . . . The fact that history has rolled over certain positions will be respected as a verdict on their truth-content only by those who agree with [Friedrich] Schiller that "world history is the world tribunal." What has been cast aside but not absorbed theoretically will often yield its truth-content only later. It festers as a sore on the prevailing health; this will lead back to it in changed situations.
>
> —Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (1966)[1]

THE FUTURE OF SOCIALISM is the future of capitalism—the future of capitalism is the future of socialism.

Socialism is an illness of capitalism. Socialism is the prognosis of capitalism. In this respect, it is a certain diagnosis of capitalism. It is a symptom of capitalism. It is capitalism's pathology. It recurs, returning and repeating. So long as there is capitalism there will be demands for socialism. But capitalism has changed throughout its history, and thus become conditioned by the demands for socialism. Their histories are inextricably connected and intertwined. This is still true today.

Society under capitalism in its concrete form will be conditioned by the need to realize capital. This means that society will be conditioned by the contradiction of capital. The future of socialism will be conditioned by that contradiction. This is an illness of self-contradiction of society in capitalism.

In the way that Nietzsche regarded capitalist modernity

Illness

What kind of illness is capitalism?

Friedrich Nietzsche described the modern affliction of nihilism in capitalism—he didn't use the term "capitalism" but described it—as an "illness, but the way pregnancy is an illness."

Socialism is the pathology of capitalism—in terms of Marx and Engels's *Manifesto*, "communism" is the "specter" —and capitalism is the pathology of socialism, always threatening its return. The question is the prognosis of socialism—the prognosis of capitalism.

The pathology of capitalism is a metabolic disorder. As capitalism is usually addressed by contemporary commentators, it is not however a disorder of scarcity or of (over-)abundance, nor of hierarchy or of equality—for instance, a problem of leveling-down. But, rather, as a problem of what Marx called the "social metabolism," it exhibits all of these symptoms, alternately and, indeed, simultaneously.

Capitalism is an imbalance of production and appropriation. It is a problem of how society produces, and how society appropriates its own production. As such it is a problem of metabolism. This is often referred to, for instance by Keynesians, as a problem of overproduction—a problem of underconsumption. But it is more self-contradictory than that. It is more than a temporary market imbalance awaiting correction, either by the state or by the market itself. Turning over the issues of production and consumption, we find that capitalism is also a problem of an overconsumption of resources—Marx called it the wearing-out of both the worker and nature—and an underconsumption of value, for instance in an overabundance of money without outlet as capital investment. It is also, however, an underproduction of resources—a wastage of nature and labor—and an overproduction of value. It is, as Marx called it, a problem of surplus-value—of its production and consumption.

The pathology of capitalism is a metabolic disorder. As capitalism is usually addressed by contemporary commentators, it is not however a disorder of scarcity or of (over-)abundance, nor of hierarchy or of equality—for instance, a problem of leveling-down. But, rather, as a problem of what Marx called the "social metabolism," it exhibits all of these symptoms, alternately and, indeed, simultaneously.

In the way that Nietzsche regarded capitalist modernity as an illness, but an illness the way pregnancy is an illness, it is not to be cured in the sense of something to be eliminated, but successfully gone through, to bring forth new life.

Is it a chronic or an acute condition? Capitalism is not well analogized to cancer because that would imply that it is a *terminal* condition. No. Rather than socialism waiting for capitalism to die, however, the question is whether socialism is merely a fever-dream of capitalism: one which chronically recurs, occasionally, but ultimately passes in time. Capitalism is not a terminal condition but rather is itself a form of life. A pathological form of life, to be sure, but, as Nietzsche—and Christianity itself—observed, life itself is a form of suffering. But what if capitalism is not merely a form of life—hence a form of suffering—but also a potential form of *new* life beyond itself? What if the recurrent symptom of socialism—the crisis of capitalism—is a pregnancy that we have failed to bring to term and has instead miscarried or been aborted? The goal, then, would be, not to eliminate the pregnancy of socialism in capitalism, not to try to cure the periodic crises of capitalism, but for capitalism to successfully give birth to socialism.

This would mean encouraging the health of capitalism in a certain sense. Perhaps humanity has proven too ill when undergoing capitalism to successfully give birth to socialism; but the pregnancy has been mistaken for an illness to be cured, rather than what it actually was, a symptom of potential new life in the process of emerging.

Past Marxists used the metaphor of "revolution as the midwife of history," and they used this very precisely. Socialist revolution would make socialism possible, but would not bring forth socialism ready-made. An infant—moreover one that is not yet born—is not a mature form of life.

These are the stakes of properly recognizing capitalism for what it is—the potential for socialism. If we mistake capitalism for an illness to be eliminated, then we undergo its pathology periodically, but fail to bring forth the new life that capitalism is constantly generating from within itself. The point then would be, not to avoid capitalism, not to avoid the pregnancy of socialism, but to allow capitalism to give birth to socialism. Bourgeois ideology denies that there is a new form of life beyond itself—that there is socialism beyond capitalism—and so seeks to terminate the pregnancy, to cure the ailment of capitalism, to eliminate the potential that is mistaken for a disease, whether that's understood as infection by a foreign body, or a metabolic imbalance to be restored. But capitalism is not a malignant tumor but an embryo. The recurrent miscarriage of socialism, however, makes capitalism appear as a tumor, more or less benign, so long as it passes—or is extracted or otherwise extirpated.

As a cancer, capitalism appears as various kinds of cancer cells running rampant at the expense of the social body: whether of underclass criminals, voracious middle classes, plutocratic capitalists, or wild "populist" (or even "fascist") masses, all of whom must be tamped down if not eliminated entirely in order to restore the balanced health of the system. But capitalism does not want to be healthy in the sense of return to homeostasis, but wants to overcome itself—wants to give birth to socialism. Will we allow it?

For this would mean supporting the pregnancy—seeing the symptoms through to their completion, and not trying to stop or cut them short.

Diagnosis

What is the prognosis of socialism?

Socialism is continuous with the "rights of human beings and citizens," according to the principles of "liberty, equality and fraternity," that "all men are created equal," with "inalienable rights" of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Socialism seeks to realize the bourgeois principle of the "free association of producers," in which each is provided "according to his need" while contributing "according to his ability." The question is how capitalism makes this both possible and impossible, and what it would take to overcome its impossibility while realizing its possibility.

Moishe Postone, in his 2006 essay on "Theorizing the Contemporary World: Brenner, Arrighi, Harvey"—a companion-piece to his other well-known essay from

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1968, continued from page 2

peasants were educated.

I spent substantial time in the Soviet Union, as well. People's thoughts about Stalinism were ambiguous. The Soviet Union had been fighting for existence for most of its life. In the face of National Socialism, the Soviets suffered 25 million casualties out of a population of 160 million in World War II. One out of every seven people in that country was killed. You had a party that became thoroughly revisionist, thoroughly capitalist. Czechoslovakia was a wake-up call.

Your generation may not recognize this, but when I listen to the other panelists, I hear exactly what we were up against in the 1960s: The Old Left is stupid for telling you about reformism and that political power grows out of the barrel of a gun. But look at the Panthers who died fighting for the revolution. If you succeed in moving against the bourgeois state, they drop the velvet glove and they come out with the iron fist. You see it around the world, when they slaughter tens of thousands of Chileans, because they dare to nationalize the copper mines.

May 1968 in France the rebel youth rose up, they shook the streets of Paris. The radical threat was so heavy that Charles de Gaulle had to flee. And yet, the reformist Communist Party of France sabotaged the whole movement in order to ingratiate themselves within the parliamentary system. We could not simply return to the Comintern. The Communist Party of the U.S. marched with the red flag in one hand and the Stars and Stripes in the other. The Stars and Stripes that stood for the slaughter and oppression and plunder of hundreds of millions of people, in war after war. They even named their bookstores after a slave-owner: Jefferson Bookstores.

Do you really think that workers are going to gradually, spontaneously get more control in factories in the age of Trump? It will be a rude awakening if you try to act on that. Then you will find out about the dictatorship of the proletariat and the fact that political power grows out of the barrel of a gun. The revolutionary state power must not only encourage and welcome, but also institutionalize the liberation of dissent in order to draw in the proletariat—to draw in the brothers and sisters in the ghetto, who have been taught to be wage-slaves instead of thinking and participating in the critical, functioning of society and the world—and in order to overcome the differences between manual labor and mental labor.

JS: In China there may have been an increase in welfare, but there was also a horrendous famine. If you do the research you will not be able to dismiss that as simply a mistake, or if you can, there is something wrong with your ethics. Certainly, members of the Communist Party tried to come to terms with that. Every single attempt at socialism took place while surrounded by hostile forces, but that hardly provides a full answer.

I want to return to 1968. While we agree it is a metaphor, the defining characteristic today is understood to be the events in France. The 40th anniversary sort of spoiled it. I remember seeing a student come out of the lift in a shirt with one of the slogans. In Paris, on the anniversary they were selling these paving stones made out of chocolate for 50 quid a piece, as well as very expensive shirts by agnès b ., and so on. It struck me that it had become a fashion statement. I had taken it seriously.

It absolutely had looked as though the people would win. If you did not live through it, I do encourage you to follow it online by reading the American Socialist Workers Party newspaper, *The Militant*. They sent reporters and had Ernest Mandel writing, and you can get a sense of that week-by-week excitement. It went beyond the students. It really did go to the factory. The ostensible sabotage the Communist Party carried out had to do with the fact they focused on a startling wage increase for the workers. As an economist, a 30 percent wage increase is simply beyond imagination. There is a sense to it, although an incoherent one.

My French comrades who had been in the Spartacist League used to say that when they became communists they believed they would be in power by the weekend. You have to be in it for the long haul. People will not be revolutionary most of the time. Learning how to educate people slowly, over time, is important. But we do not have the patience. The worst part of giving up a belief in the imminence of revolution was losing the sense that you had a reason to get up in the morning, but we find other ways.

The U.S. history Robert has described is not so hypothetical. Everyone our age, if they were south of the Mason-Dixon line, learned that the North was evil in school. The United States retains a serious historical problem: the legacy of slavery. It has not been overcome. The danger has changed. It is not that fascists want to put Trump in the White House. Forty percent of the population wanted that. They are happy with it, or they are so unhappy that they wanted to troll everybody else. It is a very serious problem.

JC: I have a problem with this idea that the Communist Party of France was traitorous. It is a bit like the old story of the Frog and the Scorpion. What else would one expect the Communist Party of France, considering its history, to do in 1968? That organization got huge wage increases, but it was not part of a strategy for socialism. It was neither revolutionary nor communist other than in name.

Similarly, if one is looking for socialism to come out from Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell, they are mistaken. By their very nature, of course they will not deliver. Does that mean that all one needs to do is group the small number of revolutionaries we have into one small organization, pick up our rifles and confront those who have tanks, aircraft, and nuclear bombs, like the Black Panthers and the students? The Black Panthers were heroic for taking on the NYPD and the LAPD, but the vast majority ended up either in prison or dead. Therefore, I do not think that is the correct lesson to learn. The students similarly had the right instinct, but when they demanded entry to car plants to speak to the workers they were turned away by the trade unions. It was, perhaps, plausible that they could overthrow Gaullism, but the idea they could overthrow capitalism is nonsense.

I am surprised by what you are saying, Judith. Perhaps you are eliding the idea of the October Revolution as the beginning of not only the European Revolution, but the World Revolution? The idea of building socialism in Russia would have been laughed at by any Marxist at the time. Of course, it is important that people live longer and that people are literate. One could give similar statistics of the increase of welfare in terms of British capitalism. But the job of socialism is to liberate humanity and it may have realistically been successful in Germany, and from Germany to the world. The problem in Russia was not that Lenin, Trotsky, or Zinoviev was stupid. The problem is that we lost in Germany. There were mass parties that were either formally or genuinely committed to socialism. That is what we do not have now.

At one level I agree with Hillel that Stalin's purging and mass killings of revolutionaries had nothing to do with us. On the other hand, it was done in the name of the revolution and by people who were formerly revolutionaries. That makes our task inordinately more complex. The solution is not to renounce communism and Marxism. Rather, we need to genuinely, ruthlessly critique what has come before, in a process of cleansing our banner from the filth attached to it because of the 20th century.

I remain optimistic. I am well aware of the overwhelming nature of the tasks in front of us. But what else is there? Either we accept capitalism, which shows all signs of decay, or we go for a world that, as Hillel explained, is not an abstract possibility, but is easily realizable if we organize our forces appropriately: a fully democratic mass party that is part of the working class. It has to include millions of people. It cannot be some sect. That is what socialism is.

HT: It is true that 1968 did not come from nowhere and it no doubt will happen again. It was very widely supported. At the time, I was amazed by the number of people, most of them young, who came over to the Left. I could not believe the numbers. It was a mass phenomenon to such an extent that it became impossible for the city of London not to employ left-wing people. We even had the weird situation where left-wing people were writing editorials in bourgeois newspapers: They had to pretend they were right-wing in their writing. I think we ought to take heart from that wide support and see that it will happen again. It will not come from a small minority but from a majority of the population demanding socialism. And that will never happen if you have idiots walking around talking about taking power with the barrel of a gun.

Mao was not some sort of latter-day Stalin, but that does not alter the fact that he caused nearly 50,000,000 people to die. We do not want a society where one man or a few people can cause that kind of result. We must have a society in which the majority rules. Clearly, we do not have it today in Britain. But you certainly do not have it in China either. The peasantry in China are very poor, the level of productivity is below that of the U.S. There is a level of science and productivity over the world in which different parts participate. The leading industrial country remains the U.S., whatever the political conditions. It is the imperial, hegemonic power. It was absolutely brilliant to see the president of China bow down to Trump, in a fully diplomatic way, as should happen with any two ruling class emperors.

Neither China nor the Soviet Union has anything to do with socialism. Socialism in one country is simply not possible. The nationalization of capital does not mean the country is therefore socialist, or even on the road to socialism. I do not know exactly what China is. I am not an expert. But everybody can see that it is not socialism. To regard it as a model is appalling.

Q & A

To me, 1968 meant the few months I spent in the Young Communist League. My decision to leave was a direct response to the Soviet tanks going into Prague. An older member of the Party explained to us, "This is not an invasion, comrades. This is determined assistance from the socialist countries to the Czech workers in their resistance to fascist restorationists who have taken power." I was 16 and lacked the experience and knowledge to argue with this guy, but I was not buying a single word.

Before I joined it, my group had already decided in 1970 that the Labour Party was dead and should not be supported in a general election. We felt the Labour Party was irrelevant; we were ready to storm the barricades, after all. Unfortunately, the working class had not read the script. The Labour party did not die.

Our view of the world is radically different to the views of most people. We have to look at what Trotsky called the transitional method. Today, I would say that means looking at things that represent real change for sections of the working class. The CPGB's paper, The Weekly Worker, *often makes the point that the National Health Service (NHS) is not socialist. But people treasure the NHS because of the common provision of healthcare it provides free at the point of use. It may not be socialist, but it is something they cherish, which they see being threatened by this neoliberal monopoly. We have to learn from new people who come in from the movement around Corbyn. The Left is very puzzled. How do we talk to these people?*

JS: What the NHS most needs, I think, is two percent more of the GDP. That will solve a lot of the problems. If we do not take advantage of this mass sentiment around the NHS in different ways, I think we are really missing a chance to meet with ordinary people, not unlike what the movement against the Vietnam war did. For my generation, you could not get up in the morning without thinking about the problem of racism and the war in Vietnam. A lot of ordinary people feel like that about the NHS right now. The movement can be hijacked, but we should be doing something more about it, which includes having some answers.

HT: The issue is not about providing an immediate solution; we are not even posing the problem properly. There has not been a genuine socialist party for many years. This is a massive problem, and I do not have an immediate solution for it. I am also unsure whether the answer is for us to go to "ordinary people," whoever they are, and ask what their grievances are. Of course, we should support them in their grievances, but our goal is something bigger: a total change of this society.

We do not have a situation where the majority of workers in the United States and the UK are in larger factories, who can come out at a moment's notice. Companies have deliberately downsized their workforce and cut it up to a large degree, so that they can control the working class as a whole. The bourgeoisie is neither inactive nor stupid. Their policies have had political consequences on the working class, as a class. How we cope with that, I do not know. But in principle one needs a party to be able to address it.

It is interesting that a panel about 1968 has mainly been about the question of Stalinism and the Old Left. I imagine that would be surprising to most young people today, who tend to think of 1968 in terms of identity politics, rather than the question of Stalinism. Something interesting that Judith Shapiro said was that identity politics in the 1960s was the result of a defeat. Could you expand on that?

JS: I should be clear that I am not pro-identity politics. That does not mean I am against the women's liberation movement, or anything. However, I am struck by the accuracy of people who have said that the ultimate identity politics has been the Trump movement. White workers will decide that they have an identity, too. I emphasize internationalism and the idea of equality, so I am uneasy about some developments. Apparently, Young Labour excluded straight white men from attending their conference, for instance. This is crazy. It is not unlike what happened with the big movements *after* 1968. But May 1968 in Paris did not have much to do with anything—except freedom. It was real. And it was not identity politics.

HT: In terms of why the discussion has focused so much on Stalinism, I think we should remember how 1968 ended in France: The Soviet Union, in alliance with the Communist party, made a deal with De Gaulle. That is what happened—Stalinism brought it to an end. The importance of the Stalinist epoch may be coming to an end, if it has not already. However, if we are talking about 1968, we cannot bypass the Stalinist epoch, which lasted almost a century. You cannot leave it out.

What figured strongly for the New Left was Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and a sense that a new generation could respond to, and move on from, previous modes of thinking. Do you think that the New Left generation represented progress, or an advance, with respect to the Old Left? Had the New Left superseded the problems of a previous generation, and was facing new ones? How did that pan out?

HT: Eastern Europe was not like the Soviet Union, which had a dictatorial form the likes of which had never existed in history, and probably never will again. Eastern Europe was much easier. They certainly wanted change, given that freedom of speech was so limited. Some of those pushing for a change, particularly in Hungary in the 1970s, were putting forward left-wing programmes. The majority appeared to want a higher standard of living, which they associated with the West. What in fact happened is quite different, which is why you have had a move towards the far right in these regions. These countries have become relatively deindustrialized. The United States, Britain, and the hegemonic powers in general have seen to that. Consequently, the opportunities for ordinary people are in some ways worse than what they had under the USSR. In other words, the shift away from Stalinism has not been a success, either.

In a sense, even though it was defeated in its immediate aims, 1968 was still a success because a large number of people were politicized. That is why people joined all these different organizations on the Left. I do not think we should decry how many groups and factions there are. That just happens to be the case. It seems to be a characteristic of the epoch we are in.

JC: I still have difficulty distinguishing what is actually meant by "the New Left." There is continuity. Contrasting the "New" against the "Old" Left does not really get us very far, I think. Nor is it a question of needing a "new" New Left. I would be quite happy with a much larger left, myself. A party needs to be understood as part of the class. According to the Marxist conception, a small group is not a party. At most, it represents a pre-Marxist conception of a party.

I would like to respond to the point about "political power growing from the barrel of a gun." Nobody will deny the power of a gun. In terms of our strategy, the real question is, do we emphasize taking up the gun in the near future? No.—The real task for the Left is actually going out there and building the Left on a mass level. So, we cannot ignore the Labour Party. We can and should criticize it. It is not going to give us socialism. Nor will trade unions. But to turn our back on them means turning our back on millions of people who will be crucial to making socialism.

If you look at the Bolshevik party, it had the overwhelming support of the working class in Moscow and Petrograd at the time of revolution. The revolution was not the act of a minority. It was the act of a majority, as confirmed in the soviets—not only of the workers, but also the soviet of the peasants. Revolution, in the Marxist sense, is a forward movement of the majority, the conquest of political power by the majority, which leads to the flowering of democracy. In terms of the spirit, if you want to use that term, of 1968—yes, there was the flowering of freedom; the flowering of sexuality; the flowering of joy; and the flowering, in that sense, of our personalities. That is what a real revolution will look like. I think 1968 gave us a glimpse of it.

What is Stalinism? Have we, or did the New Left, overcome Stalinism? Secondly, how were Marxist ideas, such as the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat, important for the New Left? Should they be important for us today? Do you think the New Left made any progress on Marxism, or on 19th century socialism in general?

HT: The most obvious definition of Stalinism is the doctrine of socialism in one country. Socialism in one country is impossible. Internally, Stalinism means the rule of a relatively small number of people. It cannot last; it is not viable. The argument has been, as Trotsky put it, that we are living in a transitional period. Stalinism is one of the peculiar forms that came into existence in this period. The movement from capitalism to socialism is going to take a period of time in which different forces show themselves, and then develop or fail to develop, before socialist forces eventually take over. Typically, the argument is that this did not *have* to happen, but was a consequence of the defeat of revolution—in essence, a result of the German Social Democrats' refusal to take power. I think that account is more or less true. However you want to put it, the idea of a transitional period between one social formation and another is necessary, it seems to me, for any historian seeking to understand the movement from the ancient world to feudalism, from feudalism to capitalism, and hence from capitalism to socialism.

In the 1960s, many leftists were critical of the welfare state. When there was talk of actually dismantling the welfare state in the 1970s, almost the entire Left shifted to a one-sided defense of it, even denouncing as "fascists" anyone who questioned the welfare state. Today, we have people like Bernie Sanders calling for a "new New Deal," and in Britain most of the Left wants the reinvigoration of the welfare state. What role did the 1960s play in relation to the welfare state at the time? What imagination regarding the welfare state was produced through the experience of 1968?

JC: Under present circumstances, we do have to defend the NHS. There was a healthy spirit of criticism about the welfare state in the 1960s. That does not mean we should chuck it away. It might mean democratization, because, speaking to people who work in the NHS, it is not like the *only* problem is lack of funding. It is top-down and bureaucratic. In a certain sense, if you look at quotas and all the rest of it, there is an eerie similarity to the Soviet Union, which should not surprise us. So, while defending it, we also need to criticize it, in order to improve it.

Some people have the idea that the worse it gets for the masses, the better it gets for the Left. In the 1960s and early 1970s, I remember thinking that, if unemployment went up in Britain to a quarter of a million, there would definitely be a revolution. People would not stand for it. Well, they did. The working class was weakened as a result. To me, that shows the greater necessity of politics, of organizing the workers around a *political* idea. Eric Hobsbawm liked to say that the working class movement in Britain was like syndicalists without a syndicalist theory. They had militancy and incredible power, but they did not know what to do with that, aside from trying to increase their living standards and defend shop stewards. We need a political idea. We need a political programme that is realistic, but that also addresses how we can link our efforts in Britain into a world revolution.

This brings us back to the question of the party. Any party will be a vanguard. A working class party, almost by definition, will be. But it will not be the *caricature* of Bolshevism that has been handed down to us. Actual Bolshevism modeled itself on the mass party in Germany. That is what it was in 1917. It was not a sect. There was full debate. There were opposition papers in the party. In my view, the dictatorship of the proletariat just means the rule of the working class. It has nothing else to it. It is not sinister. It is not about banning everybody. It is not about shutting people up. By the dictatorship of the proletariat, Marx meant only the rule of the majority and full democracy. It is about people finding their voice and taking control of their lives. That is what we saw a small glimpse of in 1968, in all manner of different fields—in art, in education, in sexual relationships, in politics. It gave us a glimpse that we would want to see again, with the hope that next time it moves onward to success, and not failure.

JS: The collapse of the USSR, the fact that there was no alternative, did enable the waves of neoliberalism that took apart the welfare state internationally. That is true. On the other hand, I remember in the dying days of the Soviet Union, we would have meetings like this, and a few Russians would come to visit. We would explain to them that they had to keep on going. They would say, "Give us a break. We have been supporting you for a long time."

Hillel, you are exaggerating a bit. Today, in China, it is not so much the case that you are forbidden from speaking your mind. Yes, you can get in trouble, but in this regard it is just like late Stalinism. When you go too far, they come and tell you, "Maybe you need a rest." That is why I am reluctant to define Stalinism too precisely. What we saw in "late Stalinism" was very different from what the USSR was like up until 1954.

The social democratic parties were horrified to

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2006, "History and Helplessness"—grasped this contradiction of our time as that between islands of incipient post-proletarian life surrounded by seas of superfluous humanity—postmodernist post-humanism and religious fundamentalist defense of human dignity, in a world simultaneously of both post-proletarian cities of abundance and sub-proletarian slums of scarcity.

Peter Frase, in an early foundational article for the Democratic Socialists of America's *Jacobin* magazine in 2011, wrote of the "Four Possible Futures"—this was later expanded into the 2016 book subtitled "Life after Capitalism"—on the supposed "inevitable end" of capitalism in four potential outcomes: either in the "communism of abundance and egalitarianism;" the "rentism of hierarchy and abundance;" the "socialism of egalitarianism and scarcity;" or the "exterminism of hierarchy and scarcity." The future was supposed to lie between two axes of contradiction: egalitarianism vs. hierarchy; and scarcity vs. abundance.

Unlike Postone—who, like Slavoj Žižek around the same moment, grasped the simultaneous existence of postmodernism and fundamentalism as two sides of the same coin of late capitalism—Frase neglects the dialectical proposition that all four of his "possible futures" will come true—indeed, that all four are already the case in capitalism. They are not merely in the process of coming true, but have been the actual condition of capitalism throughout its history, ever since its inception in the Industrial Revolution. There has been the coexistence of hierarchy and egalitarianism and of scarcity and abundance, and each has been the precondition for its—dialectical—opposite.

One could say that this has been the case since the early emergence of bourgeois society itself—that capitalist contradiction was always the case—or, indeed, since the beginning of civilization itself. One could say that this has been the condition of "class society as a whole," the condition of the existence of a "social surplus" throughout history.

This is the perspective of Alain Badiou's "communist hypothesis," for example. Badiou has mobilized a rather literal reading of Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto*, and a straightforward, if rather naïve, interpretation of communism or socialism from Babeuf's "conspiracy of equals" onwards—indeed perhaps all the way back from Jesus and His Apostles onwards. "Communism"—in Peter Frase's terms, "egalitarian abundance"—is the "land of milk and honey," where the "last shall be first, and the first shall be last."

Capitalism, understood undialectically, then, is, by contrast, the exterminism of rentism, the inhumanity of exploitation, in which scarcity and hierarchy rule through elite appropriation of the surplus. But this has been true since the dawn of civilization, since the beginning—in terms of Engels's clever footnote to the *Manifesto*'s assertion that "history is the history of class struggle"—of "recorded history."

So what is different with capitalism? What has changed is the form of the social surplus: "capital." To say, as Marxists did, that, as the possibility for socialism, capitalism is the potential "end of prehistory" is to say that all of history is the history of capital: the history of civilization has been the development of the social surplus, until it has finally taken the form of capital.

Ancient civilizations were based on a specific kind of social surplus, however. The surplus of grain beyond subsistence produced by peasant agriculture allowed for activity other than farming. Peasants could tighten their belts to feed the priests rather than lose the Word of God, and so that some knights could protect them from the heathen. But for us to return to the religious basis of civilization would also mean embracing values quite foreign to the bourgeois *ethos* of work, such as that "the sick are blessed," with the divine truth of the vanity of life, whereas we rightly consider sickness to be a curse—at the very least the curse of unemployability in society.

So what is the social surplus of capital? According to Marx, capital is the surplus of labor. It is also, however, the source of possibilities for employment in production: the source of social investment. Does this make it the source of hierarchy or of equality, of scarcity or of abundance, of post-humanism or of ontological—fundamental—humanity? It is the source of all these different apparently opposed values. It is their common condition. It is society itself, albeit in "alienated" form. As such, it is also the source of society's possible change.

Socialism aims at the realization of the potential of society. But it will be achieved—or not—on the basis of capitalism, under conditions of capital. The social surplus of capital is the source of potential societal change, of new forms of production—manifold new forms of human activity, in relation to others, to Nature, and to ourselves. Changes in capital are changes in our social relations. Capital is a social relation.

Capital is the source of endless new forms of social scarcity and new forms of social abundance—of new forms of social expropriation and of social production—as well as of new forms of social hierarchy and of new forms of social equality. Capital is the source of all such changes in society over the course of the last two centuries, since the Industrial Revolution.

Hillary Clinton, in an interview during her failed campaign for President of the U.S., said that what keeps her "awake at night" is the problem of figuring out policy that will encourage the investment of capital to produce jobs. Indeed, this is precisely what motivated Trump's—successful—campaign for President as well. Interestingly, it is unclear whether this is what properly motivated Bernie Sanders as an alternative to Clinton, or if this now motivates Jeremy Corbyn as the head of the U.K. Labour Party. In the case of Corbyn and Sanders, it seems that they have been motivated less by the problem of capital and labor than by a more nebulous concern for "social justice"—regardless of the latter's real possibilities in capitalism. In the U.K., for example, Theresa May's "Red Toryism"—by prioritizing the circumstance of the "British worker," like Trump's stated priority for the "American worker"—is actually more realistic, even if it presently has a rather limited organized political base. Corbyn, as a veteran New Leftist "social justice warrior," is actually closer to the criteria of neoliberal politics than May, whose shifting Conservative Party is not (yet) able to support her agenda. By contrast, it is a solidly neoliberal Blairite Labour Party that Corbyn leads. But Brexit, and the crisis of the EU that it expressed, is changing the landscape. May is still, however, leading the way. As is, of course, Trump.

In this sense, the issue of socialism was closer to the actual concerns of Clinton and Trump than to Sanders. Sanders offered to his followers the Obama Presidency that never was, of a "new New Deal" that is never going to be. By contrast, both Clinton and Trump were prepared to move on from the 2008 economic crisis: How to make good of the crisis of neoliberalism, now a decade old? For every crisis is an opportunity for capitalism. This is what must be the concern of *politics*.

This is the ageless question of capitalism: How is society going to make use of its crisis of overproduction, its surplus in capital—its surplus of labor? How are the social possibilities of capital going to be realized? What is the actual potential for society in capitalism?

Of course, the narrow horizons of the perspectives of both Clinton and Trump and of May for realizing the potentials of capitalism are less appealing than the apparent idealism of Corbyn and Sanders. But, realistically, it must be admitted that the best possible outcome—with the least disruption and danger—for U.S. and thus global capitalism at present would have been realized by a Clinton Presidency. If Trump's election appears to be a scary nightmare, a cruise into the unknown with a more or less lunatic at the helm, then, by contrast, a Sanders Presidency was merely a pipe-dream, a safe armchair exercise in idealism. Today, the stock market gambles that, whatever Trump's gaffes, the Republican Party remains in charge. The captain, however wild-eyed, cannot actually make the ship perform other than its abilities. The question is whether one trusts a CEO trying to build the company by changing it, or one trusts the shareholders who don't want to risk its profitability. Trump is not a safe bet. But he does express the irrepressible impulse to change. The only question is how.

Prognosis

So the question of the future of socialism is one of potential changes in capitalism. The question is how capitalism has already been changing—and will continue to change.

What seems clear is that capitalism, at least as it has been going on for the past generation of neoliberalism, will not continue exactly the same as it has thus far. There has been a crisis and there will be a change. Brexit and the fall of David Cameron as well as Trump's victory and Hillary's defeat—the successful challenge by Sanders and the rise of Corbyn alongside May's Premiership—cannot all be chalked up to the mere accidental mistakes of history.

In the face of historical change, continuity must be reckoned with—precisely as the basis for this change. How is neoliberal capitalism changing out of its crisis?

Neoliberalism is old and so is at least in need of renewal. The blush has gone off the rose. Its heroic days are long behind us. Obama rallied it to a certain extent, but Hillary was unable to do so again. The Republicans might be stuck in vintage 1980s Reaganism, but Trump is dragging them out of it. In the face of Trump, the question has been posed: But aren't we all good neoliberals? Not only Nancy Pelosi has said that, all respect to Bernie, we need not try to become socialists but remain capitalists. The mainstream Republican contender Marco Rubio said the same about Trump, while Ted Cruz retired to fight another day, against what he indicatively called Trump's "socialism." But the Tea Party is over. Now, the specter of "fascism" in the crisis of neoliberalism—which, we must remember, regards any and all possible alternatives to itself as more or less fascist—is actually the specter of *socialism*.

But what does the actual hope for socialism look like today? Does it inevitably appear as nationalism, only with a difference of style? Must the cosmopolitanism of capitalism take either the form of unmediated globalization (which has never in fact existed) or rather inter-nationalism, relations between nations? These apparent alternatives in themselves show the waning of neoliberal optimism—the decline of Clinton's "global village." We are now living—by contrast with the first Clinton era of the 1990s—in the era of neoliberal *pessimism*, in which all optimism seems reckless and frightening by comparison: Hillary's retort that "America is great already!" raised against Trump's "Make America Great Again!" Trump was critical of, and quite pessimistic about, existing conditions, but optimistic against Hillary's political pessimism—to which Hillary and Obama could only say that things aren't so bad as to justify (either Sanders or) Trump.

Were the Millennials by contrast too optimistic to accept Hillary's sober pragmatism—or were they so pessimistic as to eschew all caution of *Realpolitik* and embrace Sanders and Corbyn? Have they clung, after the election of Trump, now, to the shreds of lip-service to their concerns, as the best that they could hope for? Does Sanders—like Corbyn in the U.K.—merely say, better than Hillary or Obama, what they want to hear? By comparison, Hillary and Trump have been a salutary dose of reality—which is bitterly resented. Obama was the "change we can believe in"—meaning: very little if any. Clinton as the continuation of Obama was the sobriety of low-growth "realism." Now Trump is the reality of change—whether we like it or not. But it is in the name of the optimism for growth: "Jobs, jobs, jobs."

The problem of capitalism—the problem that motivates the demand for socialism—is that of managing and realizing the possibilities of a global workforce. This is in fact the reality of all politics, everywhere. All countries depend on international and, indeed, global trade, including the circulation of workers and their wages. Even the "Hermit Kingdom" of North Korea depends not only on goods in trade but on remittances from its workers abroad. This issue of the global workforce is the source of the problem of migration—the migration of workers. For instance, wars are waged with the problem of refugees foremost in mind. Political crisis seeks alleviation in either benign ways such as the "brain drain" of the emigrating middle-class, or malignantly in ethnic cleansing—in either case the exodus of restive surplus populations that cannot be integrated. International aid as well as military intervention is calculated in effects on migration: how to prevent a refugee crisis? The U.S. has paid countries such as Egypt and Pakistan to subsidize their unemployed through bloated militaries. What is to be done with all those seeking work? Where will they find a job? It is a global problem.

Capital is the social form of this surplus of labor—the social surplus of production. Capital is the way society tries to manage and realize the potential of that surplus. But the source of that surplus is no longer so much human activity—labor—as it is science and technology. The problem is that, politically, we have no way of marshaling this surplus other than through possibilities for labor—for instance, through managing nation-states as labor markets. The question is realizing the potential possibilities of the social surplus beyond the reproduction of an increasingly redundant laboring workforce. Will they be starved or exterminated? Or will they be freed?

The only alternatives capitalism offers is in freedom *to* work—not the worst form of freedom the world has ever known, but its possibilities in capitalism are increasingly narrow. The question is the freedom *from* work. How will this be realized? There has been mounting evidence of this problem ever since the Industrial Revolution: unemployment. Social Darwinism was not a program but a rationalization for the crisis of capitalism. It remains so today. Will humanity free itself from the confines of capital—the limits of labor?

Future

Were *Jacobin*'s Peter Frase's four possible alternative futures merely alternatives in rhetoric? Nearly no one claims to favor exterminism, scarcity, or inequality. The real future of capitalism does not actually belong to such expressions of pessimism. Fortunately, it will be appreciably better than our worst fears—even if, unfortunately, it will be much worse than our best desires. Capitalism for better or worse does indeed have a future, even if it will be different from what we are now used to. It will also be different from our dreams and nightmares.

Jacobin's Frase seems to assume that not what he calls "communism" but "socialism"—the combination of egalitarianism and scarcity—is both more possible and more desirable: for Frase, abundance carries the danger, rather, of continued capitalist "rentism" and hierarchy. For Frase, among others, the future of social conflict seems to be posed over the terms of scarcity: equality vs. "extermination;" for instance, egalitarianism vs. racism.

Both Moishe Postone's and Peter Frase's antinomies—of postmodernism and fundamentalism, and of scarcity and egalitarianism (the latter combination as Frase's formula for "socialism")—are expressions of pessimism. They form the contemporary face of diminished hopes. But capitalism will not tarry over them. It will move on: it is already moving on.

What is the future of abundance, however with hierarchy—that of continued capitalism, that is, of "capital rents"—in society, and how does this potential task any future for socialism? Where will the demand for socialism be raised? And how is it to be realized?

We should not assume that capitalist production, however contradictory, is at an end. No. We are not at an end to forms of scarcity under conditions of abundance, or at an end to hierarchies conditioned by social equality.

Citizen Trump shows us this basic fact of life under continued capitalism.

As Walter Benjamin observed in conversation with Bertolt Brecht during the blackest hour of fascism at the midnight of the last century, we must begin not with the "good old days"—which were in fact never so good—but with the "bad new ones." We must take the bad with the good; we must take the good with the bad.

We must try to make good on the reality of capitalism. As Benjamin put it, we must try to redeem its otherwise horrific sacrifices, which indeed are continuous with those of all of civilization. History—the demand for socialism—tasks us with its redemption.

The future of capitalism is the future of socialism—the future of socialism is the future of capitalism.

Addendum

Perhaps capitalism is the illness of bourgeois society, and socialism is the potential new form of life beyond the pregnancy of capitalism. Bourgeois society does not always appear as capitalism, but does so only in crisis. We oscillate in our politics not between capitalism and socialism but between bourgeois ideology and anti-capitalism—nowadays usually of the cultural ethno-religious fundamentalist communitarian and identitarian type: forms of anti-bourgeois ideology. But socialism was never, for Marxism at least, simply anti-capitalism: it was never anti-bourgeois. It was the promise for freedom *beyond* that of bourgeois society. The crisis of capitalism was regarded by Marxism as the tasking of bourgeois society beyond itself by socialism. It was why Lenin called himself a Jacobin; and why Eugene Debs called the 4th of July a socialist holiday. Socialism was to be the realization of the potential of bourgeois society, which is otherwise constrained and distorted in capitalism. So long as we live in bourgeois society there will be the promise—and task—of socialism. |**P**

1 Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Seabury Press, 1973), 143–144.

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discover that they lost in Europe after 1989 and 1990. The USSR was an empire, and it really came apart that way. It could no longer subsidize its proxies. The collapse was a long time in the making; after a certain point, it had to happen. But it is a shame it happened in the way it did.

RB: Hillel defined Stalinism as socialism in one country, which supposedly cannot exist. It is not viable. We should think seriously about what that means. Imagine you are Lenin in 1918. You have led a revolution. You are counting on the German revolutionaries to come to your aid, as you envision this whole process of revolution throughout Europe. But it does not happen. Now what do you do? Say, "This cannot exist, it is not viable," and give up?

Lenin and the Bolshevik Party did not give up. The proletariat had taken power in one country. The imperialists were invading. They did the best they could for the world revolution. They retained a base from which to spread revolution. To give that up would harm the interests of oppressed humanity.

In October the Bolsheviks had grown astronomically, but their membership was still a very small minority of the total population of Russia. The 1917 revolution was *not* a coup. But it was also not the case that a majority of Russians seized power together in one homogeneous mass. The Bolsheviks were a small minority, overall, but they had the active support and participation of millions of people. A great number of others were lethargic. They seized power. Then they had to govern. Capitalism develops unevenly through crises and upheaval. You maximize at every point what you are going to do to advance the revolution in one country, in the service of the world revolution.

One of the big problems we face is the division between mental labor and manual labor. People in this room have an ability to study *Das Kapital*. You can deal with theory in a way that the great majority of people in this country and the world cannot. Lenin recognized that. You have a group of professional revolutionaries that are deeply studying the laws of society. How are we going to act on the contradictions of society to transform it through revolution? You have to break that understanding down and take it to the oppressed people, to the proletariat. There is always going to be leadership. If it isn't you and the revolution, then it is going to be Jeremy Corbyn.

There are only two classes that can run a society today. Hillel is not sure what China is. Come on—it is a capitalist society, clearly. China is the workshop of the imperialist global system. It is run by capitalists. For the last hundred years, there have only been two classes that can run society. Either you represent the bourgeois class, operating according to the economic law of value, and you are linked in with the global imperialist market; *or*, like Lenin and Mao, you represent the proletarian class that is rupturing from the imperialist world market, and you are trying to dig up the divisions and inequalities in society that give rise to, reflect, and reinforce the operation of the law of value.

When the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968, it was an imperialist country invading and oppressing part of its empire. China today merely tarnishes the name of communism. It operates as part of the global imperialist system, part of the world market. The workers there are wage slaves.

Socialism is possible. The lesson of the 1960s is that when you become a revolutionary, you take on a great responsibility. You are going out and telling people that the world can be different. We are not religious nuts. We believe in science. But we are telling people, "Change your life. Give your life to transform the world through revolution." We need to be clear about what that is. I will conclude by encouraging you all to go to our website, revcom.us, and to look at the works of chairman Bob Avakian. Let's continue the discussion. |**P**

Transcribed by Danny Jacobs and Efraim Carlebach

50 years of 1968

Robert Borba, Judith Shapiro, Jack Conrad, and Hillel Ticktin

On February 16, 2018, as part of its Fourth European Conference, the Platypus Affiliated Society organized a panel discussion, "50 Years of 1968," at Goldsmiths University. Moderated by David Faes of Platypus, the event brought together the following speakers: Robert Borba, supporter of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP USA); Judith Shapiro, professor at the London School of Economics, former member of the Spartacist League, and adviser to the Russian Ministry of Finance; Jack Conrad, of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and the Weekly Worker*; and Hillel Ticktin, honorary Senior Research Fellow at Glasgow University. What follows is an edited transcript of their discussion.*

Panel description:

For half a century, 1968 has represented a high-water mark of social and political transformation, a year of social upheaval that spanned the entire globe. Ushered in by a New Left that sought to distinguish itself from the Old Left that emerged in the 1920s and '30s, the monumental events of 1968 set the tone for everything from protest politics to academic leftism.

Today, with the U.S. entangled in a seemingly endless war in Asia and people calling for the impeachment of an unpopular president, with activists fighting in the streets and calling for liberation along the lines of race, gender, and sexuality, the Left's every attempt to discover new methods and new ideas seems to invoke a memory of the political horizons of 1968. We can perhaps more than ever feel the urgency of the question, What lessons are to be drawn from the New Left, as another generation undertakes the project of building a left for the 21st century?

Opening remarks:

Robert Borba: What are the lessons of the struggle of the 1960s for young people who want to change the world today? Be realistic—demand the impossible! Nothing was sacred for the rebel youth back in the day. Tradition's chains came under attack everywhere as masses of youth began to challenge mainstream politics. Even the personal became political. So you changed the way you wore your clothes and hair. You listened to a different beat. Women stopped shaving their armpits and legs. Eating brown rice became a political act. As Bob Dylan sang, the old order is rapidly ageing, the times are changing.

One of my first protests was 1968. The Vietnam War was raging. Hundreds of thousands had been slaughtered by the U.S. war machine. You are with us or against us. You are with America, or you are with oppressed humanity. One day I was a pacifist singing, "Give peace a chance"; the next I was contemptuously indicting the President of the United States, "Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?" A few demos later I found myself marching alongside those wild-eyed radicals you read about in the press, chanting, "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh, the NLF is gonna win." Taking another step onto the side of oppressed humanity I sided with America's enemy against America itself. Lenin called it revolutionary defeatism.

They called the rebel generation of the 1960s the New Left. And something new was desperately needed. The Old Left, the Trotskyists, and the great majority of the world's communists, including Angela Davis, the Communist Parties of the U.S., Great Britain, France and Italy, etc., were all trying to make the bourgeois parliamentary system give birth to revolutionary offspring. It is like asking a pig to give birth to a swan. Real revolution was for later—much, much later. While they worked through the Democrats, or tried to push them to the Left, tens of thousands of us were storming the convention of the Democratic Party, the parliamentary left. Fighting in the streets.

It was easier for us. The whole world was swept up in liberation struggles, from Palestine to Vietnam, to the Cultural Revolution in China. In America, the Black Panthers stormed onto the steps of the California Capitol, guns in hand, distributing Chairman Mao's *Little Red Book*. "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." Real revolution—actually overthrowing the existing state power—had come home.

This brought me face to face with the scariest word that I had ever encountered: communism. It reminded you of hiding under your school desk as a little kid, because the commies were "gonna nuke us." But Mao leading a socialist country and calling on the youth to overthrow the party itself was more appealing than Nixon bombing the Vietnamese people. Mao was talking about a world without rich and poor, without classes, without the oppression of one section of society by another.

The Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) was founded out of this whirlwind of rebellion seeking to put the struggle in the United States on a new footing, by taking up the scientific theory of revolution. It is not just ideology. It is a science. If you are skeptical, simply consider that every state in the world today is a reflection and reinforcement of the capitalist relations of production and the ruling class. Clearly you cannot use this existing state power, for example Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party, to make change. Occupy and too many others before them have discovered that you cannot do away with the capitalist system while working within the shadow of a state that will defend class society with the full strength of its apparatus of violent repression: the army and police.

This is the fundamental lesson we learned in the 1960s. The only solution to capitalism is a communist revolution that dismantles the existing state apparatus and establishes a new revolutionary state power unlike any other in history, a vehicle for continuing the world revolution in its elimination of class society and all the reactionary ideas that grow out of and serve it. Communism: a world where humanity cooperates in organizing itself and its relations with the rest of nature; where individuality flourished on the basis of collectivity; where who you are born to, your gender, or the color of your skin does not condemn you to a place in a social division of labor. It is a world worth dreaming of. It is a world I am willing to live for and ready to die for.

But imperialism proved a lot stronger than we had expected. In the decades that followed the tremendous upheaval of the 1960s, Bob Avakian led the RCP against the fierce anti-communist onslaught of the Reagan years. Following the defeat of Mao's China, the defeat of their imperialist rivals in the Soviet Union, the triumphalism of the free market and the glories of democracy, and the relativism of radical academics, Avakian plunged deeply into summing up the experience of the Soviet and Chinese revolutions—their positive and negative experiences.

Today humanity faces the terrible danger of a fascist team that has won control of the White House in the U.S. and is hell-bent on installing a fascist regime there. The bulk of the Left has denied Trump's fascist character, just like their predecessors did in Germany in the 1930s. These forces have invested so much into trying to make capitalism and its system of parliamentary democracy do something it never has done and never will do.

Young people, rise to the unprecedented challenges facing you, with steadfast determination to defeat the looming threat of fascism, with a sweeping and irrepressible ambition to do away with everything reactionary and oppressive, so that future generations do not have to face what we are facing today. Malcolm X used to say, "We have a generation of young people today, who don't give a damn for the fact that the cards are stacked against them." You need some of that utopian spirit and fearless rebellion. But more importantly, get some scientific understanding about how to do this. Learn from the great revolutionary thinkers of the past: Marx, Lenin, and Mao. But learn most of all from Avakian's new synthesis of communism, a precious, unprecedented, scientific understanding of the need, possibility, and desirability of revolution.

Judith Shapiro: It is with extreme restraint that I am going to give my talk, as if those remarks did not just happen. I did not realize when I agreed to this that I would be sitting next to a member of an organization that brings me back to all the things I used to believe in. I was in Los Angeles when we used to have to fight physically to be able to sell the Spartacist League paper, *The Worker's Vanguard*, outside "the long march," as it was called. And the long march was dedicated very seriously to beating up its opponents. This is not the kind of world I want to live in. I believe that the RCP prefigured, as they say, all these things.

I wish that right now I still believed in the things I used to believe in, and that I still had those values of egalitarianism, a sense of camaraderie, the feeling about what a better world will be. However, I do not see how we organize it. Everybody is capitalist because we have not got a better way yet. I say *yet*, because I do believe that capitalism is still developing the forces of production. Unfortunately, it is also creating these horrible dangers, so the idea that Rosa Luxemburg had, that we face "socialism or barbarism," might be real. But, when I left the Spartacist League, I wrote in my resignation, "If it is going to be 'socialism or barbarism,' I am worried it is going to be barbarism—so I think I will enjoy the last couple of years." I was being flippant, but I was and am serious that the reason I gave up being an organized Marxist was that I just did not see the way forward.

I studied economics before I became a Marxist. All that we might learn from Marx and Marxism, which I used to teach, are things that I value as ideas, as aspirations. But I just do not see how it can work. I do not mean it will be necessarily worse, but all the societies we have seen which we call Stalinist, and so on, they have not been able to show us a way forward aside from slogans.

I gave up completely the moment I stopped believing there was another way. In particular, I did not, and do not, see how the centrally planned economy can work under democratic control. I am waiting. It is possible that big data and computers will help us solve that problem. I would like to see more cooperatives, but that is not going to replace capitalism.

On November 7, 1989, I was in Kharkov, in the Ukraine, which was still part of the Soviet Union. I saw a sea of Ukrainian yellow and blue flags fill the central square and that was the moment I knew it was over. I was with a Soviet friend who understood that too. At the train station, two days later, when I was going back to Moscow, she said to me, "Judith, must socialism be so much more inefficient than capitalism? Because if it was only 15 percent more inefficient, it would be worth it." I loved that precision. But the reason it really bothered me was that the understanding of socialists, such as Lenin and Trotsky, that socialism will unleash the productive forces, which has been written about in the *Platypus Review*, turned out not to be true. Sometimes it is fairer, but it is not more efficient. The trouble is that, until we can deliver the goods, we cannot really get very far.

That question tormented me all night long on the train to Moscow. In the morning the friend who met me there whispered excitedly that they had just opened the Berlin wall. I thought, "The question is over for now." Certainly, by then we already had China's acceptance of market reforms. I still do not entirely understand what the Communist Party of China thinks it is doing, but it is running capitalism. And I wish there were a better way. I have read everything that Platypus has to say and I do salute the attempt to answer these questions. But to me, just like the talk before, it all just sounds like slogans.

Why did these other movements come out of the New Left? Identity politics, in my opinion, was part of a defeat. In my memory, the year 1968 was not actually a high point, except in France. In the United States one really has to look at the whole 1960s epoch. What mattered, but never seemed to affect the RCP, was that the American working class was beginning to express its opposition to the war and its opposition to racism. However, many people in the United States, and to some extent Britain, took the line that the working class is finished. In the words of a future RCP member whom I knew in the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), "Life isn't gonna be so good for the American working class under the dictatorship of the Third World proletariat." That was the view that some of the sectarianism gave rise to and I do not think that was healthy.

On the other hand, even before the New Left really emerged, the developing struggles for some degree of racial justice and for women's liberation were very powerful and important. Women's liberation, in part, came out of the failures of the New Left, but it was also a success in understanding that socialism is not *just* about bread and butter. Socialism is, and has to be, about bread and butter. However, I want to see *how* the bread is going to be baked and how the butter is going to be put on the table. If we have another moment comparable to France in May of 1968, or if Corbyn and Momentum end up governing, people who have become dissatisfied will ask, "What is your alternative?"

I really appreciate the Platypus project for getting people to talk about these hard questions. It also means facing that we do not know the answers. We are still working on it. But we had better work harder, and more honestly, rather than just providing slogans. What destroyed the Spartacist League were the purges and the splits and so on. I think it is very important to build something that is open and respects other people's points of view. And I am going to do try to do that here, myself.

Jack Conrad: I will treat 1968 as a metaphor. As someone who came to politics at that time, I have to say that I took it all as absolutely normal. What was going on in the world confirmed that things had to get better, that we were going to win. You could not find anywhere or anything that was not undergoing radical change. Everything was in turmoil. Everything was being questioned and there seemed to be radical forward movement. It gave me huge courage. I was on the winning side and I was prepared to give my life for that struggle! I have devoted myself to that struggle ever since, in spite of the fact, of course, that I was *wrong*. The fact of the matter is that the system I called socialist was not socialist. That was definitively proven from 1989 to 1991. It would be idiotic not to step back and reexamine that situation.

I am not quite sure what exactly one means by the New Left as opposed to the Old Left, because certainly the people I came across, as well as official communists, were Maoists. I do not know if they are part of the New Left; they seem to be quite Old Left to me. The Trotskyists I came across looked back to Karl Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. I was vaguely aware of some New Leftism in academia. But, to me, what you had was the organized Left with a huge variety of factions.

I saw the Vietnam War every night on TV. I made the same decision in that sense: I had to sympathize and identify with the oppressed. I was not able to take any other stand. Africa was in turmoil. Black people in America were being oppressed. I certainly remember the students, the occupation in Britain, and the establishment of the Schools Action Union. It tells you how deep radicalization went that radicals were leading strikes in schools. At the 1970 Miss World contest the women's liberation movement came along and started throwing packages of flour onto the stage. My dad was appalled. I was absolutely delighted! I watched the next year's Miss World expecting it to happen again. Unfortunately, I presume the security had increased.

It should absolutely not be forgotten what the working class was doing at that time: wildcat strikes. Alongside the upturn in radicalization, capitalism was visibly going into crisis. In Britain we saw a Labour government try to introduce legislation to stop the power of the trade unions called, "In Place of Strife." It was introduced by Barbara Castle, who used to have a left-wing reputation. We saw mass political strikes against that legislation. That legislation lost. In the 1970s, when the Tories reintroduced that legislation, people like the Dockers made it inoperable. Five Dockers deliberately got themselves arrested and workers throughout Britain came out in solidarity with them. That was the 1960s, to me.

Should we then look back and say, "Those were the days!" and all the rest of it? No! Because what happened is that the Left drew the *wrong* lessons about the 1960s. The lesson the Left drew is that all we need is action, action, action. "Fight 'em in the streets. Forget the Old Left, forget the working class. All of that stuff is passé." There are good lessons to be drawn from 1968. But I do not think that the Left has actually learned them.

Hillel Ticktin: This has been a weird discussion. I had a normal political upbringing in the sense that I came from a country, South Africa, and a town, Cape Town. Though, it was possibly unique in the world, since in Cape Town the dominant left was Trotskyist. In the 1940s there were direct fights at the university between Trotskyists and Stalinists. It was real. The idea that we should ignore Trotskyism is nonsense. After all, consider how many were directly killed in Stalinism. I went not only to Cape Town University but also to Moscow University and Kiel University for a short time, where I discussed this with people in the Soviet Union. Not a single person actually supported it. Nobody. But nobody could say it.

In 1968, there was a clear change going on. Stalinism was in trouble. In 1956 you had an uprising in Hungary and in 1968, in Czechoslovakia. Soviet troops marched. People were looking at the way the Soviet Union oppressed peoples and individuals. The Left in 1968 by and large came out against Stalinism, and rightly so. Stalinism is the counterrevolution! It destroyed the revolution. That is what happened in 1923 to 1927. Trotsky, in one respect, was wrong, in that he thought the problem did not go the whole way back. Unfortunately, we have seen that it does go the whole way back. A society in which somewhere between 12 and 20 million people were simply purged—killed—is a devastating form of society. We cannot put our name to it, even as a deviation. We are totally opposed to it. It has nothing to do with us.

That terror which existed should never exist again. Stalinism was so extreme that it cannot be repeated. But, we do not have to beat ourselves up about it. This was nothing to do with the Left. It was a counterrevolution. Stalinism arose at the time when the capitalist powers directly fought against the Communist Party—the majority of the population in fact. In a sense, they were defeated by the sanctions applied and the absolute starvation they went through in this period. It is not surprising that there was a counterrevolution. However, it did not have to happen. The fault did not lie with the so-called perpetrators of the October Revolution.

The October Revolution is the greatest event that has happened to mankind for tens of thousands of years, opening the way to a genuine civilization. We have heard that socialism is impossible because there is basically no incentive. Consider what Marx said about socialism. Socialism is a society where work becomes humanity's prime want. Is it possible to have work which people enjoy and which people want to perform in order to develop themselves, or to help mankind? Quite obviously, yes, because it already exists. Most people do not do that, but a minority do. Otherwise we would not have science at all. Of course, people understand the necessity for cooperation. We are talking of automation non-stop nowadays. What is actually happening is that society is becoming more and more socialized. We see it all around us, except it is developing slower than we would want it. That is the argument for socialism. It has nothing to do with the revolution or the power of a gun.

What we have is a direct clash between social forces, those which tend to compel society towards a much more human socialized form, and those which are against it. Workers' control—that is, majority control—is a demand that continues to be made, corresponding to the increasing socialization of society. The ruling class was forced to concede in the post-war period, because it was too weak. We had full employment. Is full employment sustainable in capitalism? Of course not. They returned to unemployment. What has happened is a counterrevolution in response to what had been happening as a result of the reforms in 1945 and the direct action which took place at the time of 1968 onwards. To a degree the bourgeoisie has been successful.

The extent of privatization in Britain is unbelievable. We have a crazy situation where even the prisons are privatized. In an earlier period, a Conservative like Macmillan would regard that as stupid. In principle the working class—the vast majority of the population—opposes it, though it does not have an instrument at the moment. That is to say, there is no one party. There is no apparent direct force that can sweep away the bourgeoisies and bring the new society into being. However, we should not be that pessimistic. We did suffer a counterrevolution that has been lessened to a greater or lesser degree by the death of Stalinism, which had been essential in maintaining a conservative aura. I think we can be optimistic about the fact that the society itself will compel us to form a new party in order to change the society. When we have it, it will be a human one, let's say. A human party, which, among other things, puts freedom of speech at its center.

Responses:

RB: Imagine that the slave owners in the South had won the Civil War in America. The way history would be taught would be profoundly different. That is somewhat analogous to the history of the proletarian revolutions. They were defeated. However, the idea that somehow you rise up in one insurrectionary wave and transform everything about society to live in the communist world is implausible. The key lesson from the first wave of the communist revolutions is it will be a long, difficult, protracted battle. The one thing I agree with the other speakers about is that this requires a leading core, a communist vanguard, to enable the kind of criticism, dissent, and ferment that did not take place in that first wave.

Younger generations are being taught that communism was one unmitigated horror. Unfortunately, some of the other panelists are repeating that. The truth is much more complicated. Twenty-five years after the Chinese Revolution the life expectancy of a Chinese person had risen from 39 to 72. For the first time, the mass starvation that had plagued China for hundreds of years was eliminated as the party led the masses to transform their society and build self-sufficient agriculture. There were mistakes made along the way, no doubt. But when the bourgeoisie tells you that the lights were turned out in these socialist societies, just remember that hundreds of millions of Chinese

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